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4 October 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Richard Lehman

SUBJECT : SWS Role in the National Organization for I & W

1. The central problem in defining the future mission of the SWS resides in the fact that, under the new structure, Community line organizations will bear primary responsibility for warning, including strategic warning. The definition of mission and functions contained in DCID No. 1/5 (May 1976) will have to be revised to align the SWS role with the new arrangements and processes. The provision in DCID 1/5 which authorized the Special Assistant and the SWS to issue strategic warning notices to the DCI is the most conspicuous item that requires revision, but even this would involve more form than substance. The Special Assistant and SWS, in the "real world," obviously would never have issued a strategic warning notice independently without the collaboration of the responsible NIO and line organizations.

2. The principal question for decision, it seems to me, is whether the projected national organization for warning would be strengthened by maintaining a small interagency group of I & W specialists which performs a full-time "second-look" examination of the major Communist powers' politics, capabilities, motivations, intentions, and calculations of risks. I would contend that the "lessons" of past intelligence failures confirm the need to provide for such a specialized discipline, particularly in the field of strategic warning.

3. The new national structure, however, calls for changes in the present concept of SWS which would move the staff away from the role of principal initiator of strategic warning (never very realistic) toward a mission

SECRET

dedicated primarily to providing substantive analytic support to the NIO/Warning, the other NIOs, Community line organizations, and the Working Group.

4. Under this new role, SWS would continue to concentrate on the strategic warning problem as it applies to the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, China, and North Korea, but its mission would be broadened to include certain "little W" situations which could escalate into a major political crisis or military confrontation between a Communist power and the US and its allies. In performing these two central functions, the SWS would not be the principal initiator of warning issuances but would rather play a supporting, complementary, and consultative role in the national I & W process. Members of the SWS would act as I & W specialists, not as country or area experts who, under the auspices of the NIO/Warning and the other NIOs, would actually draft warning assessments.

5. To be more specific, the SWS, in addition to carrying on a continuing analysis of information from all sources which might provide strategic warning, would support the NIO/Warning and other NIOs in the vital functions of challenging prevailing assumptions and interpretations, developing and testing alternative hypotheses, and preparing both worst case and best case assessments. This second look or prodding function would apply both to potential strategic warning developments and to those "little W" situations which could escalate into "big W" confrontations. These SWS challenge suggestions and appraisals would be addressed only to the NIO/Warning or, at his direction, to other NIOs, not to analysts in line organizations. In this way, SWS would serve the supporting, complementary, and consultative role described in paragraph 4, but would not duplicate the work of line organizations.

~~SECRET~~

3

6. The lessons of past warning failures underscore the importance of a systematic and disciplined search for alternative interpretations of motivations, intentions, perceptions, and calculations of risks which would help to balance the incremental analysis that is often unavoidable in current intelligence. Beyond the well-established daily examination of warning indicators, the indispensable requirement of effective warning is a careful and detailed study of a nation's intentions and options and a continuing review of the assumptions and preconceptions which underlie current analysis. Post-mortems of past failures have identified the problem of intentions and political context as the areas of greatest deficiency.

7. Effective and constructive performance of the challenge/critique function requires much more than expressing reservations or disagreements with prevailing assessments. Challenge must assist the NIO/Warning, other NIOs, and managers of line organizations in the vital task of making explicit the often vague, poorly articulated, or implicit assumptions which underlie current analysis. Challengers have an obligation to put forward alternative interpretations of the same developments and information line analysts are working with and to develop reconstructions of evolving situations with which to test conventional analysis. The House Committee Staff Report emphasized the importance of long-term trend analysis and ensuring that the "right questions are asked." The Intelligence Community Staff's Post-Mortem on the October 1973 war observed that line analysts produced, in an "assembly line fashion, items which may have reflected perceptive intuition but which perforce lacked whatever benefits might have accrued from a systematic consideration of an accumulated body of integrated evidence."

8. If the SWS (or a support staff under a different banner) is to

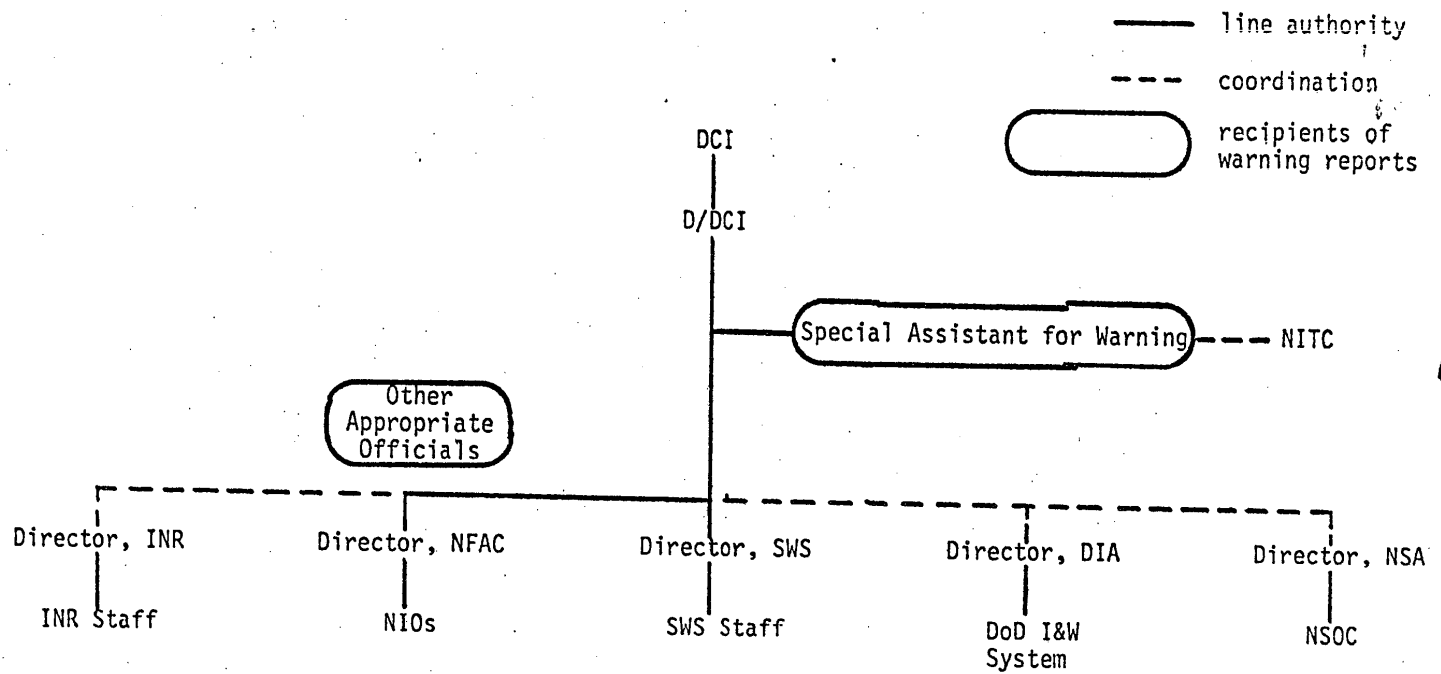
SECRET

4

undertake the broader and more demanding mission outlined above, the staff will have to be strengthened somewhat. We would need at least two more experienced and able political analysts so that the staff could be divided equally between political and military analysts. In addition to the weekly strategic warning review described in paragraphs 61-62 of the recommendations to the DCI of 22 June 1978, SWS staff members should participate in the monthly meetings of NIO "sub-Community" working groups, at least those which examine "little W" situations with a potential for escalation. The SWS should also continue to participate in various interagency groups, [redacted] and in groups drafting NIEs and IIMs which deal with major warning problems. In these ways, the relative isolation of the staff could be reduced.

9. Recommendations concerning SWS publications will have to be deferred pending decisions on our future mission. If the broader mission suggested above should be approved, it might be advisable to consider replacing the Monthly Report with ad hoc studies. The weekly Alert List probably should be either abolished or be recast to provide a vehicle for the weekly SWS-referents' warning review.

[redacted]  
Harry C. Cochran  
Director



October 1978

- Special Assistant for Warning
  - Substantive
    - . Report Warning
    - . Receive Warning
    - . Task Analyses
  - Procedural
    - . Assess Warning Process
    - . Recommend Changes
    - . Task Collection (exception basis)
    - . Chair Working Group (CIA, NSA, DIA, INR, CTS)
- NFAC/NIOs
  - Substantive
    - . Long- and Short-Term "little w"
  - Procedural
    - . Chair ad hoc Working Groups
- SWS
  - Substantive
    - . Short- (and Long-) Term "Big W"
- DIA/DoD I&W System
  - Substantive
    - . Short- (and Long-) Term "Big W" and "little w"
  - Procedural
    - . Administrative support to SWS
    - . Management and functioning of DoD I&W system
- State
- NSA